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SENSITIVE
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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA, NEA/PPD, VCI, ISN
GENEVA PASS TO USUN

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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [SY](#) [XF](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: SARG EFFORTS TO RESTRICT MEDIA COVERAGE OF UPCOMING IAEA
INSPECTION

11. SBU SUMMARY: Journalists seeking to cover the visit by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspection team to Syria June 22-24 have been given pause by media reports and rumors that the Syrian government has banned reporters from entering the country and may restrict the movements of journalists already in Damascus. A Ministry of Information (MoI) official seemed to confirm placing Syria off-limits to international reporters for the month, but cited "bureacratic re-shuffling" as the cause. Meanwhile, local and foreign journalists confirmed both denials at the border and successful entries. Local journalists were awaiting instructions from the MoI on the parameters for press coverage of the IAEA visit. The press expect the Syrian News Agency (SANA) to be granted exclusive coverage. END SUMMARY.

Banned?

12. [SBU] In advance of the visit to Syria by an inspection team from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) June 22-24, the Syrian government has denied entry to some foreign journalists and reportedly restricted journalists in Damascus from travel outside the city. The story first broke in the Egyptian media, which reported that an Egyptian journalist from "Al-Ahram" was denied entry to Syria and told "journalists could not enter from the beginning to the end of June." A Syrian opposition website picked up the story, and local and foreign journalists confirmed to EmbOffs both denials at the border and successful entries.

The Official Story

13. [SBU] With a large number of key officials in the Syrian government traveling with President Asad to India until June 21, journalists were not able to get official confirmation. The Director of Foreign Media at the Ministry of Information (MoI), Abeer Al-Ahmad, told a PD FSN, "For technical reasons, because the MoI is working on re-arranging its archive, there is no way that facilities and services can be provided to journalists. And, it will be a waste of time for them to come and sit around a hotel for a week without the proper permits. Everything will return to normal at the end of the month."

The Local View

14. [SBU] One local reporter for a Western media outlet told PolOff she was sure reporters trying to travel to Syria were being denied visas, but she was not sure how the press already in country would be treated. A reporter for a pan-Arab paper told the IO that some

reporters were being denied, but others were permitted to enter Syria. Two Syrian reporters, representing both foreign and Arab media told a PD FSN they were awaiting instructions from the MOI regarding any press coverage of the IAEA visit. They said there would be a press conference at some point during the visit, but they strongly believed no press would accompany the IAEA team or gain access to the area while the team was in country. An official at the state-run press reported to PD FSN that foreign press would not be permitted to cover the story, and the Syrian News Agency (SANA) would have exclusive coverage of the visit.

15. [SBU] COMMENT: While the Syrian government has a long history of obstructing the work of foreign journalists, this particular round appears to be connected directly to the IAEA visit and is of note given the SARG's declared intention of being open and transparent about the facility in al-Kibar.

CORBIN